

Jesus' Entry: Tragedy or Triumph?

Scripture: Mark 11:1-11, especially verse 9: "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."

Introduction:

Gene A. Smith, an American historian, authored a book entitled, "When The Cheering Stopped." The book told of Woodrow Wilson, and the events surrounding WW1. Upon the end of the war, people were optimistic. They believed that the last war had been fought. The dream was that the world had at last been made safe, and the way had been paved for democracy and freedom everywhere.

When Woodrow Wilson paid his first visit to Europe, he was greeted by large crowds, and he was cheered every place he went. In many people's eyes he was more popular than the greatest war heroes throughout the land. He was viewed as an icon of hope.

In all, the cheering lasted for about a year. Then it began to stop. The political leaders throughout Europe were interested more in their own agendas than a lasting peace, and the people slowly lost hope. On the home front, Wilson met opposition in the Senate, and his league of nations was never ratified. Under tremendous stress, his health began to fail. In the next election, his party lost. Woodrow Wilson, who almost two years earlier was heralded as a hero, came to his last days as a broken and defeated man.

History is filled with examples of people who started out humbly, rose to great popularity, and came to the end of their life in utter humiliation.

In our text today, we see such an example. Jesus, the son of a carpenter, educated in Nazareth, one who gained favor with men, one who was cheered and praised, would soon be mocked, scorned, and cast aside by the same ones who did the cheering.

On that Palm Sunday as Jesus approached Jerusalem, there were several things that He was aware of. He knew the conditions surrounding the people, and He knew the condition of the people's heart.

The Jews found themselves under heavy Roman oppression. There were heavy taxes, restrictions, numerous executions by means of crucifixion, and Jesus knew all about those things. But He knew their heart.

The Jews were in search of someone. They desired a king, a conqueror, someone to set them free. They had seen the mighty works of this man Jesus. They were witness to Him restoring sight to the blind. They saw the evidence of Him healing the lame. They saw Him feed the multitude with a little boy's lunch, and had leftovers to spare. They heard about Him raising Lazarus from the dead. They listened to Him teach with authority. Surely, with power and authority like that, Jesus was without a doubt the one who would set them free. So, Jesus came to Jerusalem, and the crowds began to cheer.

The timing was right. It was approaching the Passover feast. That was symbolic of the event where the death angel passed over Egypt, and Pharaoh let God's children go. And now, just maybe now, Jesus would somehow lead them from the restraints and cruel treatment they received from the Roman government.

Jesus knew their heart. He knew their desires.

For centuries, this Sunday before Easter has been set aside to commemorate the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Look at this story with me. Read Text {Mark 11:1-11}

Our Lord's arrival in Jerusalem

Just five days before His crucifixion is one of the stories that is reported by all of the Gospel writers.

Everybody remembers that day!

It was a joyful and glorious day...

...a time of excitement, optimism, and renewed national pride for the Israelites.

What begins with a handful of disciples offering their praise to God turns into a citywide celebration...

...And if we think about it, we can appreciate why.

I. Body

A. The Long Awaited Hope

1. After all, the people of Jerusalem had been waiting for something like this for a long time.
2. Five hundred years earlier, Zechariah had announced that one day their king would arrive—“triumphant and victorious”—and that prophecy had been indelibly etched on their minds.
3. This glory-starved nation had, in effect, been waiting for just this occasion for half of a millennium—they had been waiting for David’s successor to come galloping into town to assume His throne.
4. So, when Jesus decides that it’s time for the city’s most anticipated parade, the people are more than ready to let the party begin.
5. They line the streets, cheering wildly and lifting their voices in song: “Hosanna!”
6. “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”
7. “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”
8. “Hosanna in the highest!”
9. Some people in the crowd may have even compared Jesus to Judas Maccabeus, who had driven the Greeks out of Jerusalem a century and a half before, and no doubt, there were those who believed that this was what Jesus intended to do now.
10. Their hope was that Jesus would launch a revolution against the Romans and release the Holy City from pagan occupation.

B. A Conquering Hero?

1. Still, if the truth be told, all of their loud hosannas couldn't hide the fact that Jesus is not quite what they expected Him to be.
2. Judas Maccabeus had arrived on a white stallion.
3. Jesus arrived on this little colt of a donkey that almost left His feet dragging on the ground. Plus there is no conqueror's weapon attached to His saddle.
4. In fact, He doesn't even have a saddle, only somebody's old overcoat.
5. As we watch Jesus entering Jerusalem with friends and followers waving palms, not swords, we see again into the heart of God.
6. There is a significant little detail that is often overlooked in this story.
7. "Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 'Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here.'"
8. Jesus rode into the city on a colt that had never been ridden. An unbroken colt!
9. Anyone who has ever attended any riding, roping shows has seen what usually happens to people who sit on untamed colts, especially in the midst of shouting crowds!
10. What happens?
11. Can we sense an underlying smile here as the writer of Mark's Gospel contemplates this little miracle?
12. It may be less spectacular than stilling a storm or raising the dead but it's no less significant in its depiction of Jesus' gentle power!
13. Jesus does not need a warrior's stallion.
14. The untamed colt of a donkey makes the point just as well.
15. The power that enters the gates of our hearts does not force or violate...
16. ...it calms, transforms, and guides us!
17. Jesus doesn't fit the messianic profile of the people of Jerusalem at all....and sure enough...within a week...the grand marshal of this parade will be met with the words of "Crucify Him!" instead of "Hosanna...Bless Him!"

C. What Kind of King?

1. So what are we to make of this parade?
2. What are we to make of Palm Sunday?
3. Well, we are on sure ground when we take the historical basis of the story---the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem—as the Church has taken it, to be a meaningful symbol of Jesus as King.
 - a) There is a wealth of evidence far and wide...
 - b) ...gathered through history and experience...
 - c) ...as to Jesus' right to kingship in the lives of individuals and society.
4. We can see this validated by the way Jesus has met the deep needs of the human soul.
 - a) He meets them in that dim borderland where our reach exceeds our grasp.
 - b) He meets them in our inability to find fulfillment in material things...
 - c)He meets them in our dissatisfaction with ourselves...
 - d) ...our inescapable sense of missing the mark---not only of the life we were meant for, but also of the possibility for forgiveness and new life.
5. Jesus' right to kingship is also validated by the long line of people running down through the centuries...
 - a) ...people who have taken Him as Master and Savior....
 - b) ...people whose lives of ministering love witness directly to Christ's power to change the human heart.
6. We find another often overlooked detail in the clamor of Palm Sunday in the last verse of our Gospel Lesson for this morning.
 - a) At the end of this incredible day, Jesus does not set up a command center in Jerusalem.
 - b) He leaves the city and goes to the suburb of Bethany...
 - c) ...we assume to spend the night with His beloved friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.
 - d) At the height of His triumph, all He wants is to rest in that quiet, loving circle of friendship.
7. Jesus was not the kind of Messiah the people of Jerusalem expected, and yet they were right to greet Him as a king.
8. Because even though His kingship will not be one of might, it will be one of mercy.
9. He won't release the people from Roman occupation or take revenge upon their enemies, but He will offer them redemption!

II. Conclusion

- A. An author tells the story of an event that happened many years ago in India when a group of people traveling through the desolate countryside discovered a wounded man lying beside the road. Realizing the seriousness of his condition, they quickly carried him to a Christian mission hospital some distance away---hoping that there would be a bed for him.
- B. The physician who met them at the door took one look at the injured man and immediately saw that he was an Afghan, a member of a warring tribe.
- C. "Bring him in," the doctor said.
- D. "For him we have a bed."
- E. After examining the man, the doctor found that his attacker had beaten him so badly that his eyesight was imperiled, and without medical attention, he would have almost certainly gone blind.
- F. But rather than being grateful, the man was filled with rage. He pleaded with the doctor to restore his sight so that he could extract retribution.
- G. "I want revenge," he screamed.
- H. "I want to find the person who did this to me and kill him. After that I don't care whether I am blind the rest of my life!"
- I. "You're in the wrong place to be talking like that, my friend," the doctor explained. "This is a Christian hospital."
- J. It was founded upon the teachings of Jesus Christ, Who came to show us how to love and forgive one another, even our enemies."
- K. The man listened, but was unmoved.
- L. "Your words are meaningless to me," he said. "In my world, revenge is the only reality that counts."
- M. The doctor rose from the bedside, promising to return later and tell the man a story—a story about a person who once took revenge.
- N. That evening the doctor began his story.
 - 1. Long ago, he recounted, the British government had sent a man to serve as an envoy to Afghanistan. As he traveled to his new post, however, he was attacked by a hostile tribe, accused of espionage, and thrown into a shabby makeshift prison.
 - 2. There was only one other prisoner, and the two men suffered through their ordeal together. They were poorly clothed, badly fed, and constantly mistreated by the guards. Their only comfort was a copy of the Book of Common Prayer, which had been given to the envoy as a farewell gift by his sister in England.
 - 3. She had inscribed her name along with a brief message on the inside of the cover.
 - 4. The book served the men not only as a source for their prayers, but also as a diary in which they recorded their daily experiences. The margins of the prayer book were soon filled with descriptions of both their anguish and their faith.

5. Upon hearing of his disappearance, the envoy's family and friends back in England waited anxiously, but sadly...the two men were never heard from again.
6. But somehow the prayer book survived, and twenty years later, a man browsing through a secondhand shop came across it. He located the envoy's sister whose name had been inscribed at the front of the book, and sent it to her.
7. With deep heartache she read each entry. When she came upon the last one, however, she found that it was in a different handwriting. It said simply that the two prisoners had been taken from their cells, publicly beaten, and then forced to dig their own graves before being executed.
8. At that moment she knew what she must do. Her brother had died a cruel death at the hands of torturers in a rundown afghan jail, and this injustice must be repaid.
9. She must get revenge...but Christian revenge!
10. She gathered all the money she could and sent it to this hospital, the doctor continued. Her instructions were that it was to be used to keep a bed free at all times for a sick or wounded Afghan. This was to be her revenge for her brother's torture at the hands of Afghan attackers.
11. The wounded man was quiet... silenced by this story of such strange revenge.
12. "My friend," the doctor whispered, "you are now lying in that very bed. Your care is her revenge."

O. The crowds on Palm Sunday may not have had it quite right, but they were on target in this respect—a new power had come into the world. Only it was the power of redemption, rather than revenge!

P. "Hosanna!"

1. Notice the exclamation point.
2. Jesus had often been greeted with a question mark.
3. The world has had its millions of question marks about Jesus.
4. But here at the gates of Jerusalem were exclamation points!
5. One of the greatest journeys anyone of us can make is the journey from a question mark to an exclamation point.
6. From a question mark about Jesus to an exclamation point about Him...
7. ...from a question mark about life to an exclamation point about it.
8. And that journey can never be made by thought alone; it must be made by action!
9. When we follow Jesus, when we do the things that He says, our punctuation marks change....
10. It is no longer, "Who is this King of glory?"
11. It is "Hosanna!"

Q. Let us pray this morning that God might change our question marks into exclamation points.